

Studentinnen im Vergleich dreier europäischer Regionen: effects of gender at universities in the three regions of Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia, and Rhône-Alpes

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In der internationalen Diskussion der Hochschulentwicklung spielt die Frage nach den Chancen der Frauen eine besondere Rolle. Dabei wird einerseits die Fachbelegung thematisiert, andererseits werden die motivationalen Kriterien des Studiums behandelt.

Auch in der vergleichenden Erhebung von Studierenden in Baden-Württemberg, Katalonien und Rhone-Alpes wird diese Thematik angesprochen. Die Befunde des Vergleichs sollen einerseits der wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis, andererseits auch der Politikberatung zur Förderung des Studiums von Frauen dienen.

Im Mai 2004 wurde in der Villa Vigoni ein Seminar abgehalten mit dem Titel: Les étudiants de nos universités. Die Referate wurden im Heft 42 zur Bildungs- und Hochschulforschung teilweise dokumentiert (vgl. Publikationsliste). Darin ist ein Beitrag von B. Grimmer „Effects of Gender at Universities in the three Regions“ enthalten. Ein Auszug wird nachfolgend wieder gegeben.

16.2 Studentinnen im Vergleich dreier europäischer Regionen

Effects of Gender at Universities in the three Regions of Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia, and Rhône-Alpes

There are still many feminists affirming the university to be a male dominated institution. The low proportion of women on the top at European universities seems to corroborate this belief. However, at the undergraduate level women are well represented, and they do not seem to face severe problems and disadvantages. It seems that they have equal chances as men in terms of managing their studies.

This raises an important question: Has the discrimination of women at universities become a myth? Can we really talk about gender differences among students any longer?

Percentage of women in the different subjects

In the last 30 years the number of female students in higher education has increased significantly. About 50% of students in all of the three regions considered here are women. In Rhône-Alpes and Catalonia the proportion of female students is even clearly above 50%.

- Women in all of the three regions dominate the **humanities and languages**; this effect is actually very strong in Rhône-Alpes. A similar pattern is observable in the **social sciences** and in **medicine**.
- While in Baden-Württemberg the number of women studying **law** equals that of male law students, there are once again more women than men in Rhône-Alpes and Catalonia.
- In the subject of **economics** the Baden-Württembergian women are in the minority (34%), whereas in both of the other regions they constitute about 50% of students.

- The same situation can be observed in the **natural sciences**. In Baden-Württemberg, the proportion of women in information engineering is very low, as well as in physics and chemistry. In Rhône-Alpes more than half of the students are female in all of the subjects except for information engineering. In Catalonia the spread of the distribution of women is the largest: There are only 15% in information engineering and 84% in biology.
- These patterns of differences between regions cannot be found in the subject of **engineering**. It is strongly dominated by men in all of the three regions. Again, differences between the regions can be identified. In Catalonia 21% of students in engineering are women, whereas in Rhône-Alpes only 9%.

Table 1 Proportions of women in the subjects among the respondents in the three regions (WS 2000/01) (in per cent)			
Subjects	Baden-Württemb. (984)	Rhône-Alpes (1.230)	Catalonia (1.823)
Humanities, languages	67	85	72
- History	46	69	58
- Languages	79	91	82
Social sciences	67	85	79
- Psychology/pedagogy	85	88	91
- Political sc./sociology	43	71	66
Law	49	75	78
Economics	34	46	55
Medicine	61	76	77
Natural sciences	34	54	53
- Mathematics	38	69	61
- Information engineering	13	33	15
- Physics/chemistry	27	50	54
- Biology	55	68	84
Engineering	14	9	21
Total	42	62	61

Hence, a similarity can be recognized between the three regions and the percentage of women in the different subjects: There are female subjects like humanities, languages and social sciences, and there are male subjects like information engineering and physics/chemistry.

Motivations for the choice of subject

The choice of subject is influenced by the different expectations students have towards their subjects. Across all subjects women are on average more likely to

choose their subject because of interests and idealistic reasons (intrinsic motivations), while men more often emphasize material motivations and the possibility to achieve a high social status (extrinsic motivations).

Yet, considering the different motivations in specific subjects, one can see that men who are studying female subjects such as humanities, languages and social sciences also give idealistic reasons. And women who are studying male subjects such as economics and engineering are also motivated by materialistic reasons.

One example for this observation is the motivation to access the top management level: The homogeneity in the subjects is obviously stronger than the homogeneity of gender: For example, the motivation of men in humanities is on a similar low level as the motivation of women, and in economics, the motivations of both gender are on a similar high level.

This could be one possible explanation for the different distribution of gender and subject: In general, women seem to have other intentions than men – and because of that they choose subjects which they think are appropriate to realize their aims in the best way.

Women's study situation: contacts, integration, difficulties, and stress

Concerning the integration and contacts of students, there are no differences of gender. Women are as well integrated as men are during their studies. All students are satisfied with the relations between students and teaching staff – there are no differences in terms of gender and regions, they are also satisfied with the contacts to other students and to teaching staff.

In spite of that, women seem to have more difficulties and stress during their studies than men.

- They experience more pressure in coping with exams than their male colleagues.
- They have more problems with the social climate (measured by competition between the students and difficulties with contacts to teaching staff).
- Furthermore, they are more likely to have anxieties about failing their studies and they are more anxious about future exams.

Table 2

Difficulties and stress with exams, contacts and study success

(Percentages, categories 5+6; scale 0 – 6)

	Baden- Württemberg.		Rhône- Alpes		Catalonia	
	male	female	male	female	male	female
Stress with exams						
I am anxious about exams most of the time	16	39	37	57	31	46
During exams I am often very excited and nervous	13	23	24	28	13	23
Difficulties to prepare exams efficiently	55	53	66	73	69	75
Difficulties with contacts						
Difficulties with competition between the students	14	21	19	28	23	31
Difficulties with contacts to the teaching staff	29	29	38	45	46	48
Stress with study success and future exams						
I am often worried whether I will manage my studies	15	18	18	37	11	19
Stress caused by future exams	31	41	24	39	26	39

Proposals of women to improve their situation

It seems to be useful to have a look at the proposals of women concerning the question what might improve their personal study situation.

Especially important measures for women are (in all of the three regions):

- Improved labour market opportunities
- Practical emphasis within courses
- More training in computer skills
- Guidance from teaching staff
- Increase in student subsidies/loans

Furthermore, following topics show the highest differences in priority of women and men:

The provision of childcare facilities and the use of stricter academic guidelines are much more important for women than for men.

Another point is the gradual difference between the regions. While in Baden-Württemberg the given proposals are the less valued to improve the situation by all of the students, the Catalonians see nearly all of the proposals more helpful.

Conclusions

In general, we may consider that there are no major disadvantages for female students, neither in access to nor in success at universities. This holds true for all three regions. At first glance it seems that no special political measures are necessary.

But some observations are of interest and might arouse debates: Are political consequences necessary? And if they are, which measures are appropriate? One of those observations is the astonishing stability of subject choice. Especially women seem to be reluctant to study engineering, physics or chemistry, especially in Baden-Württemberg.

It seems that the situation at universities, the social climate and the interactions, but also the demands, the exams, the organization of study and the social situation are not very much (so to say) “lady like”. In the perception of many female students the institution seems to be “male dominated”. Maybe the articulation of proposals given by the female students is helpful for practical and political decisions.

In addition to that, the gender differences are quite similar in all of the three regions. Women seem to be a more homogenous group than French, Spain or German students. Thus, it seems to be helpful to discuss the inequality of gender among the students together, because all of the regions have similar problems with this question.

Bettina Grimmer